

OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute | A Lifesaving Legacy

Roughly 70,000 patient interactions have taken place in the [OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute](#), and the Peoria, Illinois treatment center has only been open for one year. People come from the Peoria region, and even hours away from surrounding states for the best in cancer care.

Innovative Technologies at the Forefront

Leading-edge cancer treatments like proton beam therapy, brachytherapy, genetic counseling and dietetics are all offered within the OSF Cancer Institute, providing patients with a one-stop-shop during their cancer journey.

Proton therapy

Proton therapy was first offered on April 1, 2024.

"Proton therapy lets us offer radiation therapy to patients that maybe wouldn't have been able to tolerate side effects due to tumor location, or factors such as prior radiation treatment to the same area," says Tom Cox, the vice president of operations at OSF Cancer Institute. " This is possible because protons stop after passing through a tumor, eliminating the radiation effects on tissue often treated incidentally to photon (X-ray) therapy. The OSF Cancer Institute is on track to have treated 180 patients by April 1, 2025 – which far exceeded the original first-year target of 130 patients.

Brachytherapy

The brachytherapy suite offers a more patient-friendly way for mostly prostate and gynecological (cervical, endometrial) cancer patients to receive treatment. This option involves placement of applicators or needles directly into tumors so that very controlled, effective radiation can be delivered in discrete volumes. Since the radiation is delivered from within the tumor, there is a dramatic reduction of the dose to normal tissue, even those near the tumor itself. The dose is delivered with high-dose rate techniques so the therapy is delivered in just a few minutes time.

"Being able to bring the introduction of the applicators into the body, the treatment planning CT and the treatment all in one room, has created a much better experience. We're having some really good outcomes there, and we think we can expand what we're able to do there," Cox says.

Intuitive Ion robot

The OSF Cancer Institute's pulmonology team offers state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and treatments, including minimally invasive, robotic surgeries and robotic assistive bronchoscopy. This includes the Intuitive Ion Robot, which allows care teams to get early answers and advance care for lung cancer patients.

"We're going to leverage the ability of an ion robot in the interventional pulmonary lab to really upend how we do the front end of lung cancer care," Cox says. "That robot is going to enable us to biopsy smaller lesions. It has fewer side effects than when you're getting a lung biopsy that's CT-guided. You can also do a staged EBUS (endobronchial ultrasound) exam, so you can diagnosis and stage at the same time."

Rachael Davis, MD, a pulmonologist at OSF Cancer Institute, and her team have been using the ion robot weekly. Dr. Davis and her team are training more providers, and by this summer they're expecting to quadruple – or more – how often it's used.

HIPEC procedures

Hyperthermic intraperitoneal chemotherapy (HIPEC) surgeries are now offered at the OSF Cancer Institute. Tamara Floyd, MD, a surgical oncologist with OSF performs the open surgery and removes tumors from the

abdomen. In the HIPEC procedure, heated chemotherapy is circulated through the body for a period of time. The first case went extremely well, and Dr. Floyd is planning her second case for mid-March.

In addition to treatment options, the OSF Cancer Institute is increasing cancer supportive services in the Peoria region as well.

- Cancer navigation - 13% increase (Specially trained OSF Mission Partners walking you through the process of cancer care)
- Dietetics - 64% increase
- Palliative medicine - 213% increase (Helps control symptoms, augments treatment from physicians)
- Genetic counseling - 20% increase

Nutrition journey during cancer

Part of the dietary benefits OSF Cancer Institute offers is in the CEFCU Teaching Kitchen. Oncology dietitians work with patients on recipes to cook and are there with them step-by-step during their cancer journeys. Cox says 50% of people who come in for cancer treatment have dietary risks, while 80% of those people suffer malnutrition during treatment. Having a trained, professional dietary team walking alongside you helps fight those negative complications.

OSF Cancer Institute Culture

Cox credits the Institute's first-year success to the culture of those who work there. The goal, he says, is to offer cancer support services across the entire spectrum of life.

"The Mission Partners that work in this building have completely bought in to the idea that we all are advocates for cancer patients. We're always asking patients what they need, to see if we can help them," Cox says. "If we hear there's an issue with travel, or they're having trouble keeping food down, or if their children are not coping very well (with a loved one's cancer diagnosis), we know there are resources in the building, and we try very hard to line up those resources. You can feel it when you walk through the building."

Support services after cancer treatment

"We can get you with a nurse, an exercise specialist and a dietitian to get back to your best life after cancer. Maybe you like to run a lot and ran half marathons, and you think you'll never be able to do it again. We have rehab and exercise specialists here and nutritionists. Who says you can't do that again? We're going to work with you to see you can get to the life after cancer you want to get to," Cox says.

Services and medical professionals continue to grow

Building off the first year of OSF Cancer Institute, the administrative team continues to hire world-class medical professionals to offer cancer care in Peoria. A breast surgeon was recently brought onto the team, and a colorectal surgeon will be starting soon.

Additionally, the fourth floor of the building will be built out soon. Cox says this will give much-needed space for the surgical oncology and medical research teams. Research-focused medical oncologists are currently being recruited as well.

Leaving OSF Cancer Institute healthier, and more aware

Patients who leave OSF Cancer Institute don't just leave the building as healthier people; their awareness continues and will benefit other people. Cox admits a cancer diagnosis is not an easy thing to go through, and that the support from the OSF care team doesn't stop when you walk out the door.

Grateful for community support

Cox says he's been humbled throughout the years of working in oncology by the incredible commitment of the community and region to the OSF Cancer Institute.

"It is overwhelming to me, the philanthropic spirit of our community and extended community," Cox says. "I take that as, they've made a big commitment to us, and we're making a big commitment back. We're going to bring things to central Illinois that have not been here before. We are going to support you and your family members throughout your life and keep you as healthy, relative to cancer, as we possibly can."

Looking to the future

Cox says the OSF Cancer Institute is looking to bring more pediatric cancer support services to the building, the work collaboratively alongside the adult services.

The team is creating both a lung lesion clinic and a lung multidisciplinary clinic, which aims to reduce the time from finding a cancerous lesion to treatment. The lesion clinic is expected to open in late spring.

The OSF Cancer Institute intake team has been created with oncology nurses who will answer patients' questions on the very same day, to see if services are right for you.

Cox adds that OSF is planning to put together an early detection hotline as a resource for the community to know if or when they should be screened for cancer.

To learn more about the OSF HealthCare Cancer Institute, [visit its website](#) to view the services offered and find contact information to get connected.